



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Blair Ewing

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Statement by Councilmember Blair Ewing

A Plan for Improving Mobility: A Better Approach for the People, the County and the Environment

"The people of Montgomery County want more mobility now. They want to get from home to work without great inconveniences of the current levels of traffic congestion. There is much we can do now to achieve this. We can act now to put in place the elements of a comprehensive approach to mobility for our residents. And this approach is cheaper, quicker far more practical than the other approach.

"What is the alternative? It is a balanced combination of new roads, road improvements, and transit, including buses, light rail and heavy rail initiatives. It also encourages reliance on a better balance between the location of jobs and housing, so that people who choose to do so can live closer to their places of employment.

"There are many who claim that if only we would build the Inter-County Connector, we would solve our congestion problem. They ignore the enormous cost, the timing issue, the environmental damage, and the encouragement such roads would lend to sprawl development. And they fail to take full account of the great advantages of the alternative approach, which would have a far better chance of improving mobility and minimizing negative factors associated with the ICC.

"Here's an eight-point approach to improving mobility, starting now:

- 1) Expand and improve transit now. Let's immediately add at least \$25 million, for additional buses and other transit improvements, including better signs, more schedules, comfortable bus stops with benches, and more comfortable buses. Added buses would permit frequent east-west express buses, perhaps including one from Rockville to BWI. It would allow for more buses to reach into neighborhoods, and more buses that take people to where they work. More buses

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would allow buses to run more frequently, so people could expect short waits, especially during rush hours. Frequency, convenience, and comfort will greatly increase use of buses, and this is something that can be done very soon, not in the 10 to 15 years it would take to build an ICC. Transit ridership has increased substantially even without such improvements, both in Montgomery County and in the region, as evidenced by a report published by the American Public Transportation Association last week. This report provides hard evidence of a long-term trend. Every time there is a new segment of Metro or a well-conceived new bus route, ridership increases. We have only to take the right steps to keep this trend moving in the right direction.

- 2) Improve roads and build carefully selected new roads now. The County has begun the extension of Route 28 east of Georgia Avenue through to I-95, making ultimately a straight four-lane parkway from Rockville to I-95. I support this. This road avoids the heavy environmental damage for the ICC. I also support the widening of Muncaster Mill Road, both to make it safer and to help it carry traffic more successfully. There are dozens of intersection improvements designed to help move traffic and many existing road improvements of other kinds that I support. These improvements can move ahead now. They are practical and affordable.
- 3) Approve transit-oriented development. Let's go beyond "smart-growth" to transit oriented development, focusing on greater density around transit stops to avoid the need for sprawl. We need to adjust our zoning ordinance further to accomplish that objective, while at the same time we need to protect neighborhoods around central business districts.
- 4) Extend light rail and heavy rail. Let's move forward as fast as possible with the Inner Purple Line Metro and with the Corridor Cities Transitway, making transit services east-west vastly better and faster, while also adding that very important north-south capacity as far as Frederick from the Shady Grove Metro station. North-south traffic is still the major source of traffic and traffic congestion.
- 5) Adjust the incentives for travel and change the pricing. We build roads that are free to drivers and we charge everyone who rides transit. We need to change the imbalance in costs and charges so that the incentives to use transit are greater and the disincentives for cars are greater.
- 6) Encourage employers to allow people to work at home some of the time. Telecommuting or working at home can be increased judiciously and allow many to avoid the rush hour and reduce congestion on the roads.
- 7) Engage bordering jurisdictions in joint mobility planning. We need to plan, for joint solutions to common problems. We need to join in such planning with Fairfax and Loudoun Counties in Virginia, with Frederick, Howard and Prince George's Counties in Maryland and with the District of Columbia. That has not happened. We can't solve these problems alone.
- 8) Make walking and riding bicycles to work more feasible. Making Metro and other transit stops more accessible on foot by increasing pedestrian safety, by providing sidewalks and trails will offer an opportunity to reduce automobile use, as will the provision of more bike trails and lockers for bikes at stations.

“If we implement these eight measures, we can improve mobility substantially in Montgomery County, and, more importantly, these things can all be done soon. These eight steps represent a comprehensive approach to mobility, an approach that is far cheaper, far quicker, and far more practical than relying on very expensive roads that won’t be built in the next decade and for which there are as yet no real prospects for funding.”

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